

Film an Educational Aid In New Mexico's Venereal Disease Program

By BERNARD F. ROSENBLUM, M.D., M.P.H.,
and WILSON A. CORCORAN, B.A.

NEW MEXICO, in 1955, ranked sixth in reported cases of syphilis. For the young age groups, those aged 15 to 25 years, the significance of the venereal disease problem in the State is shown by the figures for that year and for 1954.

For 1955, in the age group 15 to 25, there were 212 cases of syphilis, 797 of gonorrhea, and 9 of chancroid, a total of 1,018 cases of venereal disease of all types. This was 40 percent of the total of 2,609 for the State. For 1954, the total was 2,533 cases, of which 1,108, or 44 percent, were in the group aged 15 to 25 years.

When the film, "The Invader," was shown to the staff of the New Mexico Department of Public Health, it was agreed that here was an excellent film for use in our venereal disease educational program. It was particularly suited to the age groups we wished to reach. The film was previewed at different showings by the New Mexico Parent-Teacher Association officials, the Catholic Archdiocese, and the Ministerial Alliance. All were impressed, and gave their approval and endorsement for "The Invader" to be shown to any and all groups, including public, parochial, and private schools.

A letter was sent to all local school and parent-teacher association officials telling them of the venereal disease conditions in the

Dr. Rosenblum and Mr. Corcoran of the Public Health Service Venereal Disease Program are with the New Mexico Department of Public Health, Santa Fe, N. Mex. Dr. Rosenblum is venereal disease control officer and director of the division of preventive medicine. Mr. Corcoran, a health program representative, is also assigned to that division.

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State and of the proposal to use the film, "The Invader," as an integral part of the health department's approach to the problem. The letter included a short paragraph about the contents of the film and stated that it had been previewed and unanimously approved by the State Parent-Teacher Association, the Catholic Archdiocese, and the Ministerial Alliance. It was suggested that the local parent-teacher association preview the film one evening and present it to the students the following day. A mimeographed list of the 20 questions most commonly asked about venereal disease was enclosed, for presentation to the students prior to their viewing the film. The questions were in a "true or false" form, and the student was not required to sign his name but to give only his age, sex, and grade in school. The letter requested dates and alternate dates of the parent-teacher association meetings.

Response was immediate and overwhelming. The health department was swamped with requests for the film. With only one print on loan from the Venereal Disease Program of the Public Health Service, we were in need of additional prints if we were to carry out the educational program, including the showings of "The Invader," within a 12-month period. One print was purchased, and we prevailed on the Regional Office of the Public Health Service in Dallas, Tex., to lend us another print. With three prints to be divided among a field staff of five, stationed from 200 to 300 miles apart, and the home staff of two, the three films had to be scheduled to arrive at the right time and the right place for a 2-day stay and then be sent to the next showing. Coordinating the logistics on these procedures required the combined efforts of the home and field staffs. Because mail service is often delayed in New Mexico, the prints were sent by public interstate buses. This means of transportation is widely used in New Mexico and offers more frequent and better service to remote areas than do the railroads in transporting mail and freight.

At parent-teacher association meetings, "The Invader" was presented by a member of the health department staff, usually one of the trained venereal disease investigator-interviewers or, rarely, by a public health nurse. The usual procedure was to give a 5-minute

"The Invader"

"The Invader" is a film history of syphilis from the Renaissance to the present day. The pictures and text tell of the 400-year search of scientists for a cure for syphilis, of the discovery of penicillin by Fleming in 1928, and of Mahoney's work with penicillin which resulted in the announcement in 1943 that a cure for syphilis had been found. The film also gives an account of the fight for open discussion of syphilis so that syphilitics can be reached and the "chain of infection" broken.

The informative Film Guide for Teachers and Discussion Leaders issued by the division of instruction of the Georgia Department of Education states that the film "leaves the viewer with the feeling that everyone has a part in helping to conquer syphilis" and that "the surest control of syphilis comes from the integrity within that makes a man or woman live by decent values."

introduction, usually confined to the venereal disease situation in the State, with a few words about the length of the film. The audience was told that a question period would follow the showing of the film.

The following day, when the program was presented to students, usually boys and girls together, the introduction contained the statement that syphilis is a communicable disease and that the program was being presented on that basis and not on the basis of sex education. The students were told that a question and answer period would follow the film and also that the correct answers to the 20 questions distributed earlier would be given. These question lists, which were preferably completed a day or two prior to the showing of the film, were collected by the person showing the film and later were forwarded to the State health department for tabulation. A program has yet to be completed during which the students did not ask questions, such as, "Is there any vaccine for immunity to syphilis?" and, "Can syphilis be inherited?" Almost everyone expressed the opinion that they had learned many things they had not known before, and that they had enjoyed the film.

Some "do's" and "don'ts" may be of value in presenting this film. In making final schedules, make sure that the time does not conflict with a local basketball game, baseball game, or other event, or the program will be presented to an empty hall. When the film is to be shown to several schools in the same community, a local movie theater may be used, thereby saving precious time and personnel. It is wise to carry a projector and a screen and an extra 50 feet of extension cord. Frequently, the projector provided by the school or organization has something wrong with it, and unless a workable projector is on hand, the program will be a failure. Care should be taken to rewind the film after each showing. It is embarrassing to begin a new showing of the film and have to stop and rewind it, thus losing the attention of the audience. When making arrangements to ship the film to another location, the task of transportation should be delegated to a responsible person or the film may be mislaid and delayed, disrupting the schedule.

Through these methods and efforts "The Invader" was shown to 68,229 persons during September 1955-June 1956. The film was seen by the students and faculty of public, parochial, and private junior and senior high schools; civic groups, such as PTA's and miscellaneous clubs; and military personnel, as follows:

	<i>High schools</i>	<i>Civic groups</i>	<i>Military personnel</i>
Attendance.....	33,791	19,500	14,938
Number of groups.....	129	207	5
Number of showings....	273	207	54

The following suggestions may help in planning future programs:

1. The film should be prepared with commentaries in several languages. A Spanish commentary would be useful in New Mexico.

2. If the film could be shortened it could be used advantageously for television showing. It is very difficult and expensive to get television time, and "The Invader" runs 37 minutes, making it awkward to fit the pattern of 30-minute TV programs. A 20-minute showing, with an 8-minute discussion, would make a 30-minute program with 2 minutes for the announcer.

Because of its success in New Mexico, we recommend showing "The Invader" as an integral part of a venereal disease education program.